

National unemployment claims fall more than expected

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The number of Americans filing for unemployment benefits fell for the third time in four weeks, suggesting the labor market is still gradually recovering while remaining far from its pre-pandemic health.

Claims also tumbled in Indiana.

Initial jobless claims in regular state programs declined to 787,000 in the week ended Oct. 17, according to Labor Department data released Thursday. Without adjustments for seasonal fluctuations, claims dropped by about 73,000.

Continuing claims—the total pool of Americans on ongoing state unemployment benefits—fell to 8.37 million in the week ended Oct. 10.

The decrease in claims exceeded the predictions of economic analysts.

Economists expected 870,000 initial state claims and 9.63 million continuing claims, according to the median estimates in a Bloomberg survey.

In Indiana, 15,941 people filed initial unemployment claims in the week ended Oct. 17, down from an adjusted number of 17,916 the previous week, a decrease of 1,975, or 11%. Prior to the pandemic, the state was typically seeing fewer than 3,000 claims per week.

A total of 109,669 people were receiving unemployment benefits in Indiana as of Oct. 10, the Labor Department said. That was down from 118,930 the previous week.

Thursday's report also showed that an additional 345,440 people applied for jobless benefits nationally last week under the new Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program for self-employed and gig workers. That was a decrease from an adjusted 337,228 the previous week.

Indiana reported 12,876 new applicants for the PUA program in the week ended Oct. 17 after reporting 11,269 new claims the previous week. The state reported 105,742 people were receiving continued PUA aid as of Oct. 3, down from 175,287 the prior week.

PUA provides up to 39 weeks of unemployment benefits to individuals not eligible for regular unemployment compensation or extended benefits. Those include the self-employed, independent contractors, gig economy workers and workers for certain religious entities.

California reported the first updated figures from the state since it paused processing for two weeks to whittle down a massive backlog and improve fraud prevention. The new numbers put national jobless claims on a lower path than previously reported.

The number of people whose state benefits have expired and are now receiving aid for an additional 13 weeks from a federal extended benefit program rose last week by 509,000 to 3.3 million, the government said.